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著者	SUZUKI Michiko
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Shinju fujin, Newspapers, and Celebrity in Taishō Japan

Michiko SUZUKI

This essay interprets Kikuchi Kan/Hiroshi (1888–1948)’s bestselling 1920 newspaper serial, *Shinju fujin* (Madame Pearl), in light of media representations of a real-life celebrity named Yanagihara Akiko (1885–1967). Yanagihara was a prominent peer, socialite, writer and beauty known by the penname Byakuren (White Lotus). Taishō period readers understood Byakuren to be the model for Ruriko, the fictional heroine of *Shinju fujin*, yet scholars have not fully examined the important connection between these two stars (one real, the other fictional), nor the broader impact media celebrity culture had in shaping literary creations. Using newspaper presentations of Byakuren, particularly a 1918 biographical feature titled “Tsukushi no joō Akiko” (Akiko, Queen of Tsukushi), I analyze *Shinju fujin* as a work that makes active use of readers’ profound interest in Byakuren to explore concerns about female sexuality and agency. By building on the Ruriko-Byakuren connection and engaging with real topics covered in the national print media, the novel encourages readers to reexamine issues such as marriage between the nobility and nouveau riche, and questions about sexual transgression and female chastity. Also, by referencing newspaper stories and media coverage in this way, *Shinju fujin* self-reflexively explores questions of “truth” and “fiction” and the increasingly complex desires of the newspaper readership. In presenting a new analysis of *Shinju fujin* as part of a broader network of newspaper articles and celebrity coverage, this essay demonstrates the way in which this Taishō period bestseller dynamically incorporates and reexamines its own social context.

Keywords: Kikuchi Kan, *Shinju fujin*, Yanagihara Byakuren, “Tsukushi no joō Akiko,” Taishō period, popular fiction, newspaper serials, chastity, sexuality

Introduction

Shinju fujin 真珠夫人, serialized in *Ōsaka Mainichi shinbun* 大阪毎日新聞 and *Tōkyō Nichinichi shinbun* 東京日日新聞 from 9 June to 22 December 1920, is famous for launching the career of Kikuchi Kan/Hiroshi 菊池寛 (1888–1948). With the success of *Shinju fujin*, Kikuchi became one of the stars of the literary world; he would later go on to create the magazine *Bungei shunjū* 文藝春秋 in 1923 and the Akutagawa and Naoki literary awards in 1935.¹ *Shinju fujin*, Kikuchi’s first

1 All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. Kikuchi established the publishing firm Bungei Shunjūsha 文藝春秋社, which became a corporation (*kabushikigaisha* 株式会社) in 1928. *Kikuchi Kan nenpu*, pp. 3–5.

work of popular literature and an important bestseller of the prewar period, tells the story of Karasawa Ruriko 唐沢瑠璃子, a baron's daughter forced to marry an older, nouveau riche man named Shōda Katsuhei 荘田勝平 in order to save her family from bankruptcy and scandal.² As the wife, and soon after, the wealthy widow of Katsuhei, Ruriko becomes a *femme fatale* determined to carry out revenge on men and male-centered society. By toying with their emotions, she drives men to desperation and she herself is finally killed by a spurned suitor. In the end, however, it is revealed that all the while she had remained faithful to her first love, Sugino Naoya 杉野直也, managing to remain a virgin "chaste in both body and soul." Throughout her marriage, and even as a widow with power over men, she had maintained her "beautiful virtue which shone brightly like an untarnished pearl."³ (Figure 1)

An essay by critic Maeda Ai 前田愛, "Taishō kōki tsūzoku shōsetsu no tenkai: Fujin zasshi no dokushasō" 大正後期通俗小説の展開—婦人雑誌の読者層, has exerted significant influence on the scholarly understanding of *Shinju fujin*.⁴ Maeda emphasizes the importance of genre and gender, discussing the work as a pivotal departure from *katei shōsetsu* 家庭小説 (home fiction), a type of popular literature that emerged during the late 1890s, and suggesting that Ruriko is not the traditional home-fiction heroine, a long-suffering woman who simply endures her travails.⁵ She is a new-fangled protagonist of the 1920s *tsūzoku shōsetsu* 通俗小説 (popular fiction), speaking out as an "*atarashii onna*" 新しい女 (New Woman), and rebelling against patriarchal society. In Maeda's view, Ruriko reflects the rise during the Taishō period (1912–1926) of a new middle-class female readership. Rather than seeking fulfillment through stories that replayed their suffering within the traditional *ie seido* 家制度 (family system), these readers preferred to live vicariously through a heroine who could attack men and perform other unthinkable acts in their stead. Ruriko thus fulfills a new function for a mass female audience, enabling women to experience female power and "the fantasy of female liberation."⁶



Figure 1. Ruriko. Illustration from the *Tōkyō Nichinichi shinbun* serialization of *Shinju fujin*. Reproduced from Kikuchi Kan Kenkyūkai 2003, p. 23.

2 "Karasawa" is also written as 唐澤 in the text.

3 Kikuchi 1994, p. 299. Subsequent quotes from this work will be noted directly in the text in parentheses.

4 Maeda 1993. See Maeda 2004 for the English translation of the essay.

5 I use Ken Ito's translation for the term *katei shōsetsu* (Ito 2008, p. 4).

6 See Maeda 1993, pp. 230–45, 261, 269; Maeda 2004, pp. 175–84, 195, 200. It is beyond the scope of this essay to analyze fully the distinctions between *katei shōsetsu* and *tsūzoku shōsetsu*. Ken Ito has analyzed Meiji period (1868–1912) *katei shōsetsu* as melodramas that use "the morally exorbitant trope of family to mediate anxieties over social mobility and new expectations of gender" (Ito 2008, p. 7). Such works were also known in their day as *shinbun shōsetsu* 新聞小説 (newspaper fiction) (Ito 2008, p. 4). Works of *tsūzoku shōsetsu*, on the other hand, are often understood as post-Meiji texts, but they also explore similar questions about class, family, gender, sexuality, and morality, and frequently have melodramatic plotlines. Although these genres are usually distinguished in terms of specific authors and publication dates, the distinctions are certainly ambiguous. According to Maeda, the notion that novels like *Shinju fujin* were a new form of popular literature different from *katei shōsetsu* was already established in literary criticism by the early Shōwa period (1926–1989) (Maeda 1993, p. 230; Maeda 2004, p. 175).

Maeda suggests that Kikuchi created a new heroine and a different kind of plot, successfully tapping into the desires of women readers who wished to rebel (not just sympathize) with female protagonists. Given the rise of various women's movements during the 1910s–20s and the impact of women as consumers of popular magazines and literature, Maeda's perspective is an important one for interpreting *Shinju fujin*. At the same time, however, female readership is not the only factor that shaped the characterization of Ruriko; nor does it fully explain the novel's popularity during the Taishō period. Indeed, although critics have traditionally tended to view popular newspaper serials featuring domestic conflict and moral issues as entertainment targeted at women, just like other types of popular literature, these serials carried in nationally circulating newspapers were actually enjoyed by both men and women from a broad spectrum of society.⁷

Rather than focusing on the female reader or changes in literary genre, in the pages that follow I interpret *Shinju fujin* as an intertextual newspaper serial, very much aware of its venue and constructed through a broader network of news and features. I offer a new analysis of the work by examining newspaper representations of Itō Akiko 伊藤燐子, better known by her penname, Yanagihara Byakuren 柳原白蓮 (1885–1967). Byakuren was a real-life celebrity considered the model for the fictional Ruriko; she was a famous beauty, poet, cousin of the emperor, and wife of a coalmine magnate named Itō Den'emon 伊藤伝右衛門.⁸ Specifically, I focus on a 1918 non-fiction feature in *Ōsaka Asahi shinbun* 大阪朝日新聞 titled “Tsukushi no joō Akiko” 筑紫の女王燐子 that presents the life and writings of Byakuren.⁹ This biographical feature helped propel Byakuren to national fame, and when *Shinju fujin* was published two years later, the mass readership understood that Byakuren, as a media celebrity, was the inspiration for the fictional character of Ruriko (Figure 2).

I interpret *Shinju fujin* through the lens of Byakuren and associated news for two reasons. First, despite the fact that prewar readers and critics recognized a connection between the two female stars (one fictional, the other real), how Byakuren and the non-fiction series



Figure 2. Yanagihara Byakuren. Photograph from Nagahata 1985, unpaginated front matter.

7 The serialization of *Shinju fujin* reached a broad national readership. In 1920, *Ōsaka Mainichi shinbun* and *Tōkyō Nichinichi shinbun*, both published by Mainichi Shinbunsha, were printing approximately 622,000 and 359,000 copies daily, respectively (Mainichi Shinbun Hyakunenshi Kankō Iinkai 1972, p. 363). For examples of responses to *Shinju fujin* by men and women in Taishō period media, see Kikuchi Kan Kenkyūkai 2003, pp. 176–81.

8 She is also called Yanagihara Akiko 柳原燐子 as well as Itō Byakuren 伊藤白蓮. I follow the reading for her maiden name provided in the 1918 newspaper feature that I discuss. Throughout this essay, I refer to her as Byakuren. For more on Byakuren, see Birnbaum 1999, pp. 102–162; Hayashi 1998; Nagahata 1985; Senda 2003, pp. 88–99; Suzuki 2010, pp. 72–75, 77–78; Yanagihara 1928; Yanagihara Byakuren-ten Jikkō Iinkai 2008.

9 Tsukushi is the old name for Kyushu. When quoting from this ten part series (*Ōsaka Asahi shinbun* 1918e), I note the number of the serialization (nos. 1–10) parenthetically in the text.

“Tsukushi no joō Akiko” influenced and even directed the creation of Kikuchi’s bestseller has never been discussed. Although it is difficult to reconstruct authorial intention or the exact reading practices and viewpoints of any group of readers, we can gain some insight into the Taishō readership and Kikuchi’s textual creativity by reading intertextually in this way. I suggest that Byakuren is particularly important for understanding the themes of female sexuality and agency that were associated with the protagonist Ruriko and that also reflect broader social concerns about modern female identity.

Second, the presence of the media and news within the actual text of *Shinju fujin* has not been fully investigated, despite its critical role. It is no accident that major events in the story are all framed as scandals covered and analyzed by various newspapers. The questions of morality, money, class and gender that the novel explores are in fact all issues that were discussed in the real news of the period. By recognizing how actual contemporary issues and events, especially those associated with Byakuren, are woven into the fabric of *Shinju fujin*, we can better understand the novel’s engagement with and critical consideration of media, and of celebrity culture and its consumers during the Taishō period. In addition, investigating *Shinju fujin* from this perspective opens a new window into various critical issues and ideas of the times. In the sections that follow, I illuminate the Ruriko-Byakuren connection, the representation of Byakuren in “Tsukushi no joō Akiko,” Ruriko’s signification in *Shinju fujin*, and the novel’s self-reflexive inquiry into ideas of “truth” and “fiction.”

“Who is ‘she?’”: Ruriko and Byakuren

The narrative structure of *Shinju fujin* is quite elaborate; it opens as a mystery, in which a man named Atsumi Shin’ichirō 渥美信一郎 shares a taxi with a stranger (the eldest son of Baron Aoki 青木男爵). The car crashes into the mountainside on a windy road; the fellow passenger dies and Shin’ichirō becomes the sole witness to his last words and wishes. Putting the fragments of “evidence” together (Aoki’s mysterious words, his feelings written in a notebook), Shin’ichirō understands that the dying man was asking to return a watch to a lover who had betrayed him. In order to carry out this request, Shin’ichirō must find out the identity of the woman who played with Aoki’s emotions.

In the beginning, readers follow the story through Shin’ichirō’s experiences and thoughts. He remains in the dark at this point about Ruriko; he sees her at Aoki’s funeral, but she is only a vague image that he recalls from “pictures and reports” (p. 32) in magazines and newspapers. Although having heard the name “Ruriko” (p. 20) spoken by the dying man, Shin’ichirō is unsure if she is really the same woman. It is in answer to Shin’ichirō’s question, “Who is ‘she?’” (p. 47), that the narrative goes back in time to tell Ruriko’s story of heartbreak and enforced marriage.

With this opening, *Shinju fujin* is framed as a quest to find out the “truth” about Ruriko. Hinting that this mysterious woman is, in fact, Ruriko herself, the text delves into her essential qualities and past history. Additionally, this framework suggests another interpretive layer to the narrative, that there is a “true” model behind the fictional character that must be discovered. Ruriko is a made-up character, but at the same time echoes and interprets a familiar celebrity featured in the media’s “pictures and reports.”

This real-life celebrity is Yanagihara Byakuren. By 1920, when *Shinju fujin* was being serialized, Byakuren was already well known as a tragic member of the *kazoku* 華族 (peer-

age), who had been “sold” in marriage to a *narikin* 成金 (nouveau riche) in 1911. She was simultaneously seen as a victim and glamorized for her social connections and wealth. She was also a romantic *tanka* 短歌 poet who published her first poetry collection *Fumie* 踏絵 in 1915. In 1918, trials about a mining bribery scandal involving many in her social circle led to renewed interest in Byakuren. Soon afterwards, her fame was enhanced with the publication of “Tsukushi no joō Akiko,” a ten part celebrity-gossip type feature on her life, serialized in *Ōsaka Asahi shinbun* from 11 to 21 April 1918. This dramatic series by an unnamed writer included photographs and excerpts of her poetry; much was made of Byakuren’s beauty, her marital circumstances, the legends surrounding her family and her passionate writing. Such “real life” human interest stories were published regularly in the newspaper, but “Tsukushi no joō Akiko,” showcasing a celebrity, was especially successful.¹⁰

Although we now consider Tokyo the media center of Japan, this was not the case in the early history of Japanese newspapers. By late Meiji, *Ōsaka Asahi shinbun* was already a nationally circulating paper with a greater readership than *Tōkyō Asahi shinbun* 東京朝日新聞. *Ōsaka Asahi shinbun* was also important for the development of literature, annually awarding a prestigious prize to new authors and serializing their work in its pages.¹¹ Within this context of national readership, “Tsukushi no joō Akiko” reinforced the fame of Byakuren as a household name; after its publication she received fan mail (including love letters) from various parts of Japan.¹²

It is important to note that *Shinju fujin* is not a *roman à clef*; Ruriko’s story is not the disguised life story of Byakuren. Yet the idea that Ruriko was modeled on Byakuren seems to have been widely accepted by the 1920s–30s readership.¹³ Critic Takagi Takeo 高木健夫, drawing on his own experience as an excited reader waiting patiently for each installment of *Shinju fujin*, discusses the Ruriko-Byakuren connection as a given, commenting: “The success of *Shinju fujin* . . . was predetermined by the fact that [the protagonist] was modeled on Yanagihara Byakuren, . . . the representative tragic beauty of the Taishō period.”¹⁴ Most strikingly, Byakuren herself sent a letter to Kikuchi after the newspapers published promotional advertisement for *Shinju fujin*, inquiring if she was the model for the heroine.¹⁵ Kikuchi did not deny the connection while the novel was being serialized; rather, he actively used it to garner popular interest and develop themes in the text.

There are no in-depth discussions by Taishō readers that state exactly why people made this link between the two women, and scholars have not explored this connection in terms of textual detail. However, *Shinju fujin* clearly guides the audience to see the Byakuren references. As a girl, Ruriko is in love with Naoya, also a peer, and they intend to marry. But when a *narikin* named Katsuhei overhears the couple ridiculing his ostentatious display of wealth,

10 For examples of newspaper articles that mention Byakuren in relation to the Kyushu bribery scandal, see *Ōsaka Asahi shinbun* 1918c; 1918d; 1918e, no.2. “Tsukushi no joō Akiko” itself notes that this event “resurrected Akiko [Byakuren]” as a fixture in “the popular everyday world” (no. 2). For other types of “real life” features in this newspaper, see *Ōsaka Asahi shinbun* 1918a; 1918b.

11 Like *Ōsaka Mainichi shinbun*, *Ōsaka Asahi shinbun* was one of the major, nationally circulating newspapers of the day. In 1918, *Ōsaka Asahi shinbun* was printing about 341,000 copies per day. See Yamamoto 2006, pp. 409–412.

12 Hayashi 1998, p. 153; Nagahata 1985, pp. 167–71, 250–51.

13 See Kawakami 2001, pp. 66–67.

14 Takagi 1976, p. 214.

15 Kikuchi 1995, pp. 350–51. For the 1920 advertisement in *Ōsaka Mainichi shinbun* and *Tōkyō Nichinichi shinbun* that prompted Yanagihara’s inquiry, see Kikuchi Kan Kenkyūkai 2003, p. 11.

he vows to punish them for their insolence. He proceeds to drive Ruriko's father, Baron Karasawa, into debt and leads him to commit a crime; in exchange for canceling debts and erasing scandal, Katsuhei then demands the much younger Ruriko as his bride. Several key aspects of the plot here—Ruriko's forced marriage to a *narikin* who is significantly older, the social issues surrounding this alliance, media coverage of the wedding, and even critical parts of Ruriko's character—are unmistakably linked to Byakuren, especially as she is represented in newspaper reports and in "Tsukushi no joō Akiko."

With the World War I economic boom from 1915 to 1920, newspapers reported on the outrageous behavior of *narikin* who became rich overnight and flaunted their wealth; they were reviled by ordinary citizens who suffered as a result of inflation.¹⁶ Katsuhei reflects the excesses of real nouveau riche, while the hapless and morally weak men of the peerage (Ruriko's and Naoya's fathers) mirror noblemen, frequently in the news for their involvement in sexual, financial and criminal scandals. The nobility, established as a class in 1869, had an official mandate to serve as exemplary "models" for the populace.¹⁷ The reality was often far removed from this ideal, as they were not all cultured, virtuous, or even financially stable. Indeed, the fictional Baron Karasawa's overspending in pursuit of a political career echoes the scandal of a real-life peer who went into debt for a million yen in 1915 due to his political activities.¹⁸

Shinju fujin reflects news reports of the negative behavior of *narikin* and *kazoku*, as well as their real-life alliances. Another well known phenomenon of the time was the *ōgon kekkon* 黄金結婚 (golden marriage), a calculated match between the poor nobility and the upstart nouveau riche, enabling both parties to gain money and social status, respectively. Such marriages were increasing in number and considered examples of the decline of the peerage.¹⁹ In *Shinju fujin*, the Katsuhei-Ruriko wedding is presented as a scandalous golden marriage of great interest to the public, covered by various newspapers and analyzed in diverse ways in the media:

Those of you who have a good memory may perhaps remember the sensational marriage of Miss Ruriko, daughter of Baron Karasawa, a wedding covered by all the Tokyo and Osaka newspapers at the end of September 1917.

The first reason this marriage created great debate and turmoil in people's hearts was due to the gross difference in age between the bride and groom. Two or three newspapers called it "the second Komori Kōko incident" and lamented the negative effect it would have on people's morals . . .

The men and women who saw the picture of the bride and groom in the newspapers all furrowed their brows. But the significant age difference between the couple was not the only reason this marriage fueled controversy in society. The other reason was the rumor that *narikin* Shōda Katsuhei bought the daughter of the Karasawa family with money. One newspaper denied such rumors, saying that Baron Karasawa, known as

16 *Asahi kuronikuru shūkan nijuseiki*, pp. 1917-14–1917-15; Kikuchi Kan Kenkyūkai 2003, pp. 37–38. For more on *narikin*, see Hidaka 2003, pp. 168–71. See Yamamoto 2003, pp. 89–90 for examples of news reports on *funa narikin* 船成金 (nouveau riche shipping magnates).

17 *Iwanami Nihonshi jiten*, p. 225; Senda 2003, p. 10. For more on the nobility, see Kikuchi Kan Kenkyūkai 2003, p. 38; Lebra 1993.

18 This peer is Nijō Motohiro 二条基弘. For more on his debt, see Senda 2003, pp. 154–58.

19 Senda 2003, p. 278.

the most respectable and upright nobleman in the House of Peers, would never do such a despicable thing. Another newspaper said, as if reporting the truth: “Shōda Katsuhei looks up to Baron Karasawa as a role model, so he used several hundred thousand yen to save the Karasawa family finances. Baron Karasawa gave his daughter away because he felt indebted.” . . . Together with such articles, opinions by female education specialists and social commentators also filled the newspaper pages. One person expressed indignation that the overbearing use of money by *narikin* was destroying social morals. Another pointed out that just as the daughters of rich American men marry European peers and thereby exchange wealth and rank, in Japan today there are many marriages between the poor nobility and rich families, and concluded that this is an unfortunate tendency and indicates the fall of the nobility. (pp. 114–15)

In describing the marriage, the narrator mentions the “Komori Kōko incident” (Komori Kōko *jiken* 小森幸子事件), a reference to the “Kobayashi Kōko incident” (Kobayashi Kōko *jiken* 小林幸子/孝子事件), an actual 1909 scandal in which a minister of the Imperial household agency, a count (*bakushaku* 伯爵) over sixty years old, procured a twenty year old woman for marriage.²⁰ But while referencing this well known incident, the text is actually making a clear connection to another, even more recent nobility scandal, the iconic 1911 golden marriage between the *narikin* Itō Den’emon and the peeress Yanagihara Byakuren. The discussions of the Katsuhei-Ruriko wedding by the fictional press corps in *Shinju fujin* clearly reproduce the real media’s treatment of the Itō-Byakuren alliance (Figure 3).

The Itō-Byakuren union epitomized the undesirable nature of golden marriages, mirroring the negative aspects of both *narikin* and *kazoku*. Itō was an illiterate, former miner, a fifty two year old widower with numerous mistresses. Byakuren was a twenty seven year old divorcee, daughter of a count and related to the emperor.²¹ Their wedding caused an uproar, not only because of age and class differences, but also due to the idea that a noblewoman had been “sold”—underscoring the degeneracy of the *kazoku* and the rising power of *narikin*. It was rumored that Byakuren’s brother needed Itō’s financial backing in order to become a member of the House of Peers.²² The actual



Figure 3. Yanagihara Byakuren and Itō Den’emon. Photograph from Yanagihara Byakuren-ten Jikkō Iinkai 2008, p. 8.

20 For more on this incident involving Kobayashi and Tanaka Mitsuki 田中光顯, see Hidaka 2003, pp. 174–76; Kikuchi Kan Kenkyūkai 2003, p. 68; Sezaki 2008, p. 254. All of these sources note that her name is reported as both 幸子 and 孝子. I use the reading provided in *Ōsaka Asahi shinbun* 1918e, no. 6 and *Tōkyō Asahi shinbun* 1911a, no. 2: “Kobayashi Kōko” 小林孝子.

21 For the ages of Itō and Byakuren at the time of their marriage, I use the information in *Asahi Shinbunsha* 1997, p. 298; *Shinbun shūsei Taishō hennenshi Taishō jūnendo ban gekan*, p. Hoi 1126; *Tōkyō Asahi shinbun* 1911a, no. 1; *Tōkyō Asahi shinbun* 1911b.

22 Birnbaum 1999, pp. 111, 123; Senda 2003, pp. 91–92.

1911 coverage of the marriage in *Tōkyō Asahi shinbun* as well as the 1918 “Tsukushi no joō Akiko,” published in *Ōsaka Asahi shinbun*, provide information about monetary transactions regarding the match; they also offer various viewpoints on the union by discussing the difference in the couple’s social stations and the effect the marriage would have on moral standards.²³

Perhaps it is not surprising that “Tsukushi no joō Akiko” uses similar phrases and ideas from the earlier 1911 news reports, published by the same newspaper



Figure 4. Katsuhei and Ruriko after their wedding. Illustration from the *Tōkyō Nichinichi shinbun* serialization of *Shinju fujin*. Reproduced from Kikuchi Kan Kenkyūkai 2003, p. 67.

company. But it is remarkable to discover that *Shinju fujin* copies key words, details and notions from “Tsukushi no joō Akiko” in describing the Katsuhei-Ruriko wedding. Just like their real counterparts, the fictional bride and groom marry at the Hibiya Daijingu 日比谷大神宮 shrine and the wedding reception is held at the high-class Imperial Hotel 帝国ホテル.²⁴ “Kobayashi Kōko” (no. 6) is mentioned in “Tsukushi no joō Akiko,” and *Shinju fujin* also borrows specific words and phrases from this celebrity feature in discussing the marriage: those hearing about the union “furrowed their brows” (*mayu o hisometa* 眉を顰めた) and newspapers “lamented the negative effect it would have on people’s morals” (*sedō jinshin ni oyobosu akueikyō o nageita* 世道人心に及ぼす悪影響を嘆いた) (pp. 114–15).²⁵ The golden wedding in *Shinju fujin*—its associated social issues, newspaper coverage, and even descriptive language—mirrors the real life marriage presented in “Tsukushi no joō Akiko.” In other words, the Katsuhei-Ruriko union is a fictional reenactment of the Itō-Byakuren marriage as portrayed in the media (Figure 4).

Using references to real people and events in the media in this way, Kikuchi clearly encourages readers (“those of you with a good memory”) to see Ruriko as an interpretation of Byakuren. Although critics have read this novel as a highly intertextual work containing many allusions to famous novels, themes, characters and scenes, these

23 *Ōsaka Asahi shinbun* 1918e, no. 6; *Tōkyō Asahi shinbun* 1911a, nos. 1–3.

24 In *Shinju fujin*, the shrine is abbreviated as “Daijingu” (p. 116) while in “Tsukushi no joō Akiko,” it is called “Hibiya Daijingu” (no. 6). For more about the shrine, see Kikuchi Kan Kenkyūkai 2003, p. 69.

25 In “Tsukushi no joō Akiko,” the phrases used are “furrowed their brows” (*mayu o hisomete* 眉を顰めて) and “it cannot be said that there is no possibility that this would negatively affect people’s morals” (*sedō jinshin ni warui eikyō o ataeru koto ga nai to mo ienai* 世道人心に悪い影響を與へることがないとも言へない) (no. 6). “Tsukushi no joō Akiko” borrows various phrases, passages and ideas from the 1911 news reports (*Tōkyō Asahi shinbun* 1911a, nos. 1–3). *Tōkyō Asahi shinbun* 1911a, no. 2 mentions “Kobayashi Kōko,” and the passage about immorality in this article reads: “the negative effect this would have on people’s morals would not be insignificant” (*sedō jinshin ni oyobosu akueikyō sukunashi to sezu* 世道人心に及ぼす悪影響尠しとせず). In this sense, *Shinju fujin* incorporates both the media portrayal of the actual event as well as the subsequent 1918 celebrity feature.

overt and detailed allusions to Byakuren have been overlooked.²⁶ I would suggest, however, that this media-oriented intertextuality is critical to our understanding of *Shinju fujin*. By intentionally blurring the boundary between real news and fiction, Kikuchi not only highlights actual concerns of the times, but provides readers with further means of more deeply interpreting Ruriko and the issues she manifests.

“Tsukushi no joō Akiko” and Byakuren’s System of Representation

Given the clarity of the connection between Ruriko and Byakuren, one may wonder why this aspect of *Shinju fujin* has not been explored in detail. The most significant reason for the oversight is that Byakuren would later become even more notorious for the so-called 1921 Byakuren incident (Byakuren *jiken* 白蓮事件), a love scandal that took place a year *after* the publication of *Shinju fujin*. Although Byakuren was a well known celebrity before 1921, this incident, one of the major scandals of the Taishō period, was so prominent it has overshadowed Byakuren’s presence in pre-1921 media.

The Byakuren incident occurred on 20 October 1921: Byakuren ran away from her husband Itō to be with a younger socialist activist named Miyazaki Ryūsuke 宮崎龍介 (1893–1971). Two days later, *Tōkyō Asahi shinbun* and *Ōsaka Asahi shinbun* published a full-page spread with pictures, detailing the story of her unhappy marriage, the lovers’ romance and their flight. The following day, both papers published Byakuren’s letter to Itō explaining that she left him due to the lack of love in their marriage.²⁷ All major newspapers and magazines immediately followed suit, analyzing the incident and its aftermath. As a result of this scandal, Byakuren was stripped of her nobility status and officially became a commoner. She divorced Itō in 1921 and legalized her marriage to Miyazaki in 1923; it lasted until her death in 1967. Throughout the prewar period, she remained in the public spotlight as a celebrity author.²⁸

In 1921 after this incident, Kikuchi published an essay denying the connection between Ruriko and Byakuren.²⁹ In this way he made an effort to disassociate himself from the scandal. But the link was already well understood within the popular imagination, and there is no doubt that his novel enjoyed a rich “afterlife” thanks to Byakuren’s increased notoriety. In the present day, scholars may not immediately seek to interpret *Shinju fujin* through the figure of Byakuren because the fictional work predates the famous love scandal. But in fact, the text actually builds on Byakuren’s (pre-love incident) star image to develop many of its motifs and ideas.

26 The most recognized textual presence is *Konjiki yasha* 金色夜叉 (1896–1902), a bestselling Meiji *katei shōsetsu* about revenge against new money written by Ozaki Kōyō 尾崎紅葉 (1867–1903). The novel is discussed at length in Ruriko’s own literary salon. Critics agree that themes from *Konjiki yasha* are echoed in *Shinju fujin*. For discussion of intertextual references to *Konjiki yasha* and other works, see Hidaka 2003, pp. 160–62; Kawakami 1993, pp. 260–61; Kawakami 2001, pp. 83–84; Maeda 1993, p. 244; Maeda 2004, p. 184; Sezaki 2008, pp. 255–58; Taguchi 1994, pp. 61–62. For an examination of *Konjiki yasha*, see Ito 2008, pp. 86–139.

27 By 1921, *Tōkyō Asahi shinbun* and *Ōsaka Asahi shinbun* were printing approximately 292,000 and 483,000 copies per day, respectively (Yamamoto 2006, p. 410).

28 For more on the Byakuren incident, see Birnbaum 1999, pp. 102–162; Hayashi 1998; Nagahata 1985; Senda 2003, pp. 88–99; Suzuki 2010, pp. 72–75, 77–78; Yanagihara Byakuren-ten Jikkō Iinkai 2008, pp. 31–44, 89–90. For reprints of the major newspaper articles on this incident, see Asahi Shinbunsha 1997, pp. 293–324; *Shinbun shūsei Taishō hennenshi Taishō jūnendo ban gekan*, pp. Hoi 1125–55.

29 See the essay collected in Kikuchi 1995, pp. 350–51.

If we invoke the terminology of contemporary celebrity theory, we can see that by 1920 Byakuren had already attained celebrity status on various levels: 1) “ascribed celebrity” as a “product of lineage;” 2) “achieved celebrity” for her poetic “talent and accomplishment;” and 3) “attributed celebrity” from the “concentrated” media spotlight on her marriage and life.³⁰ A nationally famous star can be considered a “system of representation,”³¹ an image embodying ideologies, conflicts and anxieties that resonate with the public.³² Byakuren, from this perspective, reveals key interests and concerns of the Taishō readership, issues that were also critical to the development of Kikuchi’s text.

What did Byakuren indicate as a “system of representation?” As a high-profile *kazoku* united with a *narikin*, she manifests anxieties about class and social change. And as a woman considered both passionate and chaste, she also embodies critical questions regarding female sexuality. This is made explicit in the 1918 “Tsukushi no joō Akiko”; typical of narratives about celebrities, the work attempts to take the reader beyond the public persona, to get at Byakuren’s *real* experiences, thoughts and feelings, particularly the truth about her sexual/romantic life.³³ The series especially focuses on the mysterious disconnect between Byakuren’s writing (passionate love poetry) and real life (loveless marriage).³⁴ Calling her “Byakuren ni” 白蓮尼 (the nun White Lotus), the text suggests that Byakuren lives in loneliness, unfulfilled as a wife, disengaged from a husband whom she does not love. But the writer also wonders if the sexual passion in her writing actually has a factual basis, referring to a rumor about her illicit romance with a “certain doctor” (*bō hakushi* 某博士) (nos. 1, 6–8).

Through such a seemingly contradictory presentation, Byakuren signifies both aspects of female sexuality that fascinated the Taishō audience, and were widely discussed in the print media: sexual transgression and chaste virtue. Although extramarital affairs and female purity were certainly not subjects exclusive to the Taishō period, during this time these topics were actively explored as part of newly emergent female identities and gender roles, love scandals, and debates about love, marriage and chastity.³⁵ Such media discussions about female sexuality were imbricated with the idea of modernity and social/cultural changes, and often associated with critical issues, such as gender difference or inequality. Under the civil and criminal laws of the time, for example, a wife’s infidelity could be grounds for divorce and a jail sentence of up to two years, but husbands were not equally subject to such punishment. For example, a man could only be punished for having an affair with another man’s wife.³⁶

Although Byakuren’s actual crime (running away with a lover) did not occur until 1921, even the speculation that she might be cheating on her husband created a sense of intrigue and rebellion. Her intimate poems about forbidden love underscored her transgressive image, and also symbolically enabled her “sexualized” circulation in the public (print) sphere. The narrator in “Tsukushi no joō Akiko” notes: “In truth, her poetry collection is made

30 Holmes 2005, p. 10; Rojek 2001, pp. 17–18.

31 Holmes 2005, p. 10.

32 Dyer 2004a; 2004b.

33 For discussions about the pursuit of authenticity associated with celebrities, see Gamson 1994; Holmes 2005.

34 Birnbaum notes that the series questions the “exact sources of her many passionate poems,” assuming that they are not inspired by her “crude, aging husband.” See Birnbaum 1999, pp. 113–14.

35 For some examples of such discussions, see Asahi Shinbunsha 1997; Iwabuchi 1998, pp. 306–314; Kawamura 1994; Muta 1996, pp. 138–43; Orii 1991; Sato 2003; Tipton 2005.

36 See Mackie 2003, pp. 23–24; Molony 2005, p. 243; Tipton 2005.

up mostly of love poems. . . . Are you [Byakuren] just an unrequited lover of love? But are you not a married woman? What a lenient man your husband is!” In one poem quoted in the newspaper series, Byakuren even writes about the desire to torment men: “Let me have beauty/like that of a witch/who overpowers many men, the playboys” (no. 9).

At the same time, however, Byakuren’s allure was also produced through the ideal of *teisō* 貞操 (chastity/fidelity/purity). Historically in Japan, *teisō* implied fidelity to one’s husband, either dead or alive; it was considered the correct behavior for a wife or widow. But with influences from Christianity as well as discourses of sexuality and the human body, the word *teisō* became associated with broader notions of virginity, sexual purity and abstinence. The concept no longer simply meant faithfulness in marriage.³⁷ By the time of the famous 1914–15 *teisō ronsō/shojo ronsō* 貞操論争/処女論争, the so-called Chastity or Virginity debates about female sexual purity that unfolded in various journals and newspapers, the broadly defined concept of “being pure” was already an established female ideal intrinsic to a woman’s individual worth.³⁸ “Tsukushi no joō Akiko” makes suggestive references to the possibility of an extramarital romance, but at the same time it underscores Byakuren’s pure image as a woman who rejects her philandering husband and seeks solace through her poetry. The text suggests that she is so chaste that she even refuses to have marital relations: “According to a source close to her, she has not slept with her husband in seven years” (no. 8).

The image of the beautiful and tragic nun-wife resonated with the mass audience. Kujō Takeko 九条武子 (1887–1928), another well known Taishō celebrity, projects a similar image as her key appeal. A baroness and bestselling poet, separated from her husband for ten years while he lived in London, Kujō was constantly in the limelight for her beauty and her poems of loneliness.³⁹ A woman keeping to herself in “the empty bedroom” (*kūkei* 空閨) could be the subject of pity, admiration and even sexual titillation. But chastity, a “traditional” virtue, could also be a part of “modern” female identity, a means for women to express individual agency. Women at this time had few social or legal rights; accordingly, chastity and virginity, in the words of sociologist Muta Kazue 牟田和恵, became a valuable “means for establishing female selfhood and identity.”⁴⁰ Although this self-validation through ideals of purity was limiting and ultimately reinforced the sexual double standard, girls and women could perform their own individuality and choice by withholding favors (being pure/virginal) or bestowing them on a particular person (expressing love or sexuality).⁴¹ In this way, chastity was not only an expression of normative morality, but could also reflect female agency and even rebellion.

“Tsukushi no joō Akiko” explains that Byakuren sleeps in a room separate from her husband and refuses to open the door when he knocks at night. Such behavior is compared

37 For this shift in meaning, see Muta 1996, pp. 138–43.

38 For more on this debate, see Iwabuchi 1998, pp. 306–314; Orii 1991, pp. 11–130, 274–84. For more on *shojo* in relation to this debate, see Muta 1996, pp. 138–43; Suzuki 2010, pp. 51–53.

39 Kujō Takeko was born into Kyoto’s Nishi Honganji 西本願寺, the head temple for the Jōdo Shinshū Honganji 浄土真宗本願寺 sect, and married to Baron Kujō Yoshimune 九条良致. She was also known for her Buddhist charity work. See Hayashi 1998, pp. 231–34; Senda 2003, pp. 50–56.

40 Muta 1996, pp. 142–43.

41 Both these liberating and confining aspects of chastity are discussed in Kawamura 1994, pp. 183–248; Muta 1996, pp. 138–44.

to that of Queen Victoria who “hated” her husband Albert (no. 8).⁴² In “Tsukushi no joō Akiko,” Byakuren’s chaste life is simultaneously pitied, admired, and also sexualized through the narrator’s voyeuristic gaze. Yet the text additionally expresses uncertainty and circumspection towards this woman able to manage her own sexuality, defy her husband and resist participation in a family-brokered marriage. The work vacillates between different possibilities for her identity: a woman of “many passions” or a misunderstood “pure woman” (no. 8). Her love poems are considered in different ways: as evidence that she has had an affair, or, conversely, that she is only expressing her imagination. But in addition to whether or not she is “really” pure or faithful, the text also questions the nature of her chastity: as submission or as resistant self-expression. If Byakuren is a system of representation, then her image embodies the range of possibilities for modern female sexual identity and the questions and uncertainties they create. By being both transgressive *and* pure, she forces readers to examine the meaning and parameters of these notions within the context of a changing modern society.

Rereading Ruriko in *Shinju fujin*

In *Shinju fujin*, Kikuchi recreates Byakuren’s paradoxical combination of sexual transgression and chastity in the character of Ruriko. Although it is inaccurate and limiting to view Ruriko *only* as a fictionalized version of a real person, it is important to read Ruriko *through* Byakuren in order to fully understand her qualities of being both *yōfu* 妖婦 (*femme fatale*) and *teijo* 貞女 (chaste woman). In the story, Ruriko is an unwilling bride, who fights to remain sexually pure; she vows vengeance against her husband by refusing to consummate their marriage. In this endeavor, she frustrates him so much that he eventually tries to rape her and dies from a heart attack. As a wealthy widow, Ruriko then becomes a *femme fatale* surrounded by admirers. Only after her death is it revealed that she had always remained true to her first love Naoya, wearing his photograph next to her skin (sewn into her undergarment) and staunchly maintaining her virginity.

Ruriko is usually interpreted as a kind of disjointed character, as she manifests both “good” and “bad” qualities in this way. Maeda Ai has explained this composite in terms of a shift in literary genres, from *katei shōsetsu* to *tsūzoku shōsetsu*, suggesting that the novel explores new taboo themes while being restrained by the established formulae of earlier moralistic *katei shōsetsu*.⁴³ Feminist critics also express difficulty in evaluating Ruriko’s challenges to patriarchal society; although she openly denounces male control and rejects the sexual double standard, she dies at the end a “pure” *ryōsai kenbo* 良妻賢母 (Good Wife, Wise Mother), who devotes herself to the well-being of her stepdaughter Minako and the continued prosperity of Katsuei’s family line.⁴⁴

Instead of focusing on the struggle between mainstream morality and subversion, or a conflict between literary genres, I suggest that Ruriko’s dual nature, as an exaggeration of

42 Birnbaum says that long after the completion of this series, the Japanese populace remembered Byakuren for “reports of how she locked the bedroom door against her wealthy husband when he sought her favors and for other such personal details” (Birnbaum 1999, pp. 111–12).

43 Maeda 1993, pp. 241–45; Maeda 2004, pp. 182–84.

44 For various perspectives, see Kawakami 1993, p. 264; Kawakami 2001, pp. 69–73; Komashaku 1978; Yoshikawa 1997, pp. 28–29.

Byakuren, functions on two levels. First, it allows the audience to revisit questions raised about Byakuren by using Ruriko as an interpretive filter. Second, these questions about Ruriko/Byakuren (Is she good or bad? Is her chastity a virtue or vice? Is her sexuality safe or transgressive?) interrogate broader social issues of the period, a historical moment in which gender roles and sexual morality were being critically redefined and debated. In the context of modernity, even chastity, traditionally considered an exemplary female virtue, could become an ambivalent practice.

Ruriko's protection of her virtue reveals an admirable fidelity to Naoya, but her expression of sexual independence through chastity is threatening to the patriarchal order. Her refusal of Katsuhei leads to his demise, and her subsequent refusals to remarry result in the violent deaths of several men. She is associated with the image of "Nemesis, the goddess of revenge" (p. 22), and she claims that her goal is to avenge all wronged women "who have been turned into living corpses" by the "violence and self-centered desires of men." She rejects "male-centered morals" that allow sexual freedom only for men and oppress women, and critiques laws that permit licensed prostitution. Ruriko is not a traditional temptress in that she is actually a virgin, and her reason for leading men on is to retaliate for the fact that "men in the world toy with women" and destroy their "bodies and souls" (pp. 212–14). Chastity here does not ease male anxiety about female infidelity or paternity. Rather, it becomes an articulation of female agency that directly threatens male authority.

Just as Byakuren in "Tsukushi no joō Akiko" refuses to let Itō into her bedroom, Ruriko also keeps her room locked and her husband out. Even more dramatically and cruelly, however, Ruriko recruits her mentally disabled stepson to stand guard in front of the door every night, not only preventing Katsuhei's entry, but also creating a rivalry between father and son. Ultimately, Katsuhei's attempt at rape is combined with a violent father-son showdown, resulting in the patriarch's death and the son's banishment from society. Ruriko's insistence on female sexual purity thus destroys the framework of the family, male lineage and the status quo. Within this fictional setting, the traditional idea of chastity is dramatically transformed into a fierce expression of female agency.

Additionally, by showing Ruriko's delight at seducing and disempowering men, *Shinju fujin* interrogates the then contemporary belief in the connection between pure body and pure selfhood/spirit. Female virtue was understood as being inscribed on the body, manifest as an intact hymen, a lack of physicality, or control over sexual practices. Because physical purity validated a woman's inner spirit, the female body had to be vigilantly monitored. In the Chastity/Virginity debates, for example, discussion ensued about what chastity really means for female identity. What were we to think about those who have "lost" their virtue due to circumstances outside their control, such as rape or the need to support their families? Could a "fallen" woman redeem herself, or was her individual worth irretrievable?⁴⁵

The 1918 "Tsukushi no joō Akiko" also explores this body-spirit connection by asking whether or not Byakuren's suggestive poetry about forbidden love is produced by an actual pure body. In other words, were her poems simply the result of an overactive imagination, or were they rooted in actual physical transgression? For readers of "Tsukushi no joō Akiko," the answer to this question and the true state of Byakuren's body were ultimately unknowable. In contrast, *Shinju fujin* allows readers to find out the truth about Ruriko's

45 See Iwabuchi 1998, pp. 306–314; Orii 1991, pp. 11–130, 274–84.

sexuality. But there is a twist: Ruriko is a virgin, but juxtaposed against her pure body is her corrupt behavior. Even while fulfilling the stereotype of the cruel virginal Amazon, Ruriko parodies the female body-spirit connection. The narrator explains that after the death of her husband, returning to her “pure virginal days (*shōjō naru shōjo jidai* 清浄なる処女時代) was impossible. Her body (*nikutai* 肉体) would have permitted it, but not her spirit/heart (*kokoro* 心)” (p. 158). The text suggests that her spirit has been poisoned by her vengeance against Katsuhei, which ironically was enacted by the protection of her physical virtue. Ruriko’s efforts in preserving her body and sexual agency lead to spiritual degeneration and facilitate the excessive tragedies portrayed in this novel: the death of her husband, the confinement of her stepson, the indirect death of Baron Aoki’s eldest son, the suicide of Aoki’s younger son Minoru 稔, and finally her own death.⁴⁶

As a deadly avenger fighting on behalf of sexually victimized women, Ruriko challenges gender inequalities in Taishō society. But ultimately, her rebellion is curtailed at the end of the story. Ruriko dies a repentant Good Wife, Wise Mother (and self-sacrificing daughter/sister), and her sins are exonerated by her death and the revelation of her virginity/fidelity. Ruriko’s father forgives her, and she helps her brother succeed in his career; not only does she save and rebuild her natal Karasawa family, but she also secures the future of the Shōda family. When she is finally able to meet Naoya on her deathbed, she does not express any sentiments of love but instead expends her last breath pleading for him to look after her stepdaughter (Katsuhei’s daughter) Minako 美奈子. Thus, Ruriko provides Minako with a trustworthy male authority figure to safeguard Katsuhei’s family line.

At the end of the novel, the narrator-author comments that even he does not know “Minako’s fate” since “the future” has not yet come to pass, but “we should feel at ease in leaving her in Naoya’s hands” (p. 300). This can be read as hinting at a future marriage between Minako and Naoya. If so, Ruriko has acted as the perfect mother, who finds an ideal man for her daughter and creates a new, superior bloodline that brings together *narikin* and *kazoku*, but this time as an alliance without fault. Minako, who we assume will inherit the wealth, is virtuous, kind, attractive and educated, and Naoya, who we assume will inherit the baronage, is a handsome, intellectual, and resourceful, yet non-materialistic, man involved in overseas trade. Ultimately the story turns out to be a safe text for the Taishō readership: no actual sexual transgressions take place, and male authority and family order are reestablished.⁴⁷

By considering the figure of Byakuren hovering behind the fictional Ruriko, we can see the inevitability of this resolution. *Shinju fujin* performs a difficult balancing act, capitalizing on Byakuren’s allure as both pure and transgressive, but suggesting that she is, in the end, a good woman. Although Kikuchi was able to kill off Katsuhei, the Itō character, without any impunity, he stopped short of making Ruriko into a vamp without a conscience. Byakuren’s star-image may have freely circulated in the cultural imaginary,

⁴⁶ The text gives an additional reason for Ruriko’s spiritual corruption: she has become accustomed to “material wealth” (p. 158). This can be read not only as a critique of new money, but also as commentary on Ruriko’s threatening pursuit of financial (as well as sexual) autonomy. Although it is not explicitly stated in the text, as a widow she presumably controls the Shōda family assets because her stepson is mentally disabled. Thus, there is no incentive for her to remarry. If she were to become a wife again, her husband would have control over her property and she would become legally “incompetent” under the Meiji Civil Code.

⁴⁷ For analyses of this novel as focusing on the family system, see Asai 1997, pp. 64–66; Yokohama 2003. For an interpretation of this ending as one that would have seemed overly optimistic to Taishō readers, see Yamamoto 2003, pp. 90–93.

but as a member of the peerage and a cousin of the emperor, her body/spirit could not be unequivocally defiled, even in fiction. In comparison to peers who had disgraced themselves in actual scandals, Byakuren's reputation in 1920 was secure. At the end of *Shinju fujin*, Ruriko's essential identity is determined to be a virtuous (pure) Good Wife, Wise Mother. This definitive signification of Ruriko also indirectly redeems Byakuren's image: she is reestablished as a fascinating, yet safe, celebrity for consumption by the masses.

Consuming Media: Accessing Truth as Compensation

Although reports and stories about celebrities often focus on getting at the private truth behind their public lives, readers can never ascertain the authenticity of these media-presented "facts." Key parts of *Shinju fujin* highlight this unreliable aspect of print media by using the framework of newspapers to recount Ruriko's tale. The narrative discusses how her story is covered in the news, what the general public sees or thinks, and contrasts this to what has actually occurred. This framework underscores the unreliability of facts reported in the media, while giving readers of the novel full access to Ruriko's story. This perspective is in direct opposition to that of "Tsukushi no joō Akiko," a non-fiction series ultimately unable to reveal the truth about Byakuren's life and thoughts. Even in the last installment, the text continues to present differing opinions and rumors about Byakuren as a woman, wife, and poet. In contrast, when *Shinju fujin* comes to a close, the outcome is clear; readers are privy to all of Ruriko's secrets and have become members of a special, inner circle that knows much more than the so-called general public.

In his influential analysis of *Shinju fujin*, Maeda Ai claims that reading this work functioned as a "compensatory act" (*daishō kōi* 代償行為) for the female audience, providing a temporary escape from the male-centered world.⁴⁸ Maeda's argument is that the work compensates female readers for restrictions in their own lives because it allows them to revel vicariously in Ruriko's outrageous behavior. If we borrow this concept of the "compensatory act," but without limiting it to a gendered audience, we can say that as a newspaper serial, *Shinju fujin* provides "compensation" to general consumers of print media. To be sure, how newspaper serials satisfy readers is a complex question, but one significant compensation for Kikuchi's readers is that they are given access to the truth about Ruriko. Although newspaper readers may desire to know the truth and collect all the facts, this desire cannot always be fulfilled by the news reports and features they access. In contrast, because it is a fictional text that engages with real news, *Shinju fujin* is able to provide satisfaction in this regard.⁴⁹

Even in the early parts of the novel as illustrated by the Katsuhei-Ruriko wedding, readers already know more than the media corps. Readers are aware that the majority of explanations given in newspapers for the marriage are completely untrue: Katsuhei's respect for Baron Karasawa as a "role model"; "Karasawa Ruriko's strong sense of vanity" (p. 114). And by the end of the novel, they become privy to the events that led up to Ruriko's death and the suicide of her murderer, young Aoki Minoru; they even know the truth about Ruriko's chaste body. Again, their knowledge is accurate, unlike media reports:

48 Maeda 1993, p. 261. In Copeland's translation, the term is rendered as "vicarious compensation" (Maeda 2004, p. 195).

49 For different analyses of the use of the media framework in *Shinju fujin*, see Hidaka 2003, pp. 172–82, 190–91; Sezaki 2008, pp. 252–59.

The newspapers in Tokyo devoted most of their social interest columns to discussing the deaths of Aoki Minoru and Ruriko. They all said a number of different things, but they were all consistently similar in illustrating Madame Ruriko as a beautiful vampire, who feasted on the blood of men. Some of them compared her death to that of the *femme fatale*, Carmen. People who had heard of the lady's extravagant, free and decadent lifestyle never doubted the newspaper reports. The public praised her beauty, but ferociously criticized her attitude; no one but Minako and Naoya knew of her true feelings and true character. (pp. 299–300)

The readers are on par with Minako and Naoya in terms of knowing the truth. Their insight into Ruriko compensates readers for their actual daily lives as the general public, who can only consume news with neither intimate knowledge nor certainty.

Shinju fujin's ability to provide a compensatory truth culminates in the last scene in which a portrait of Ruriko establishes her real identity. The narrator reminds us that even after her death, Ruriko lives on in a painting by her brother:

Readers who have a good memory may remember that a portrait titled “Shinju fujin” 真珠夫人 was exhibited at last year's Nikakai 二科会 group art show and won the art critics' praise as the greatest work of the autumn season. It showed the young lady standing, a pure, noble figure with pearl-like beauty. It was said that the success of the portrait was due to the expertise with which the artist illustrated in her face intelligence, spirituality and a glowing expression unique to the enlightened, modern woman. (p. 300)

Unlike inaccurate newspaper reports that posthumously described Ruriko as a “vampire,” the Nikakai portrait presents the ultimate truth about Ruriko as the chaste “Madame Pearl.”⁵⁰ Furthermore, the ending playfully suggests that just like this painting with the same title, the serialization of *Shinju fujin* is accurate, and to be differentiated from other stories in newspapers. (The painting is signed “K.K.,” the same initials as those of Kikuchi Kan.)⁵¹ Unlike false or speculative news reports with only a limited shelf life, Kikuchi's art (cherished by dedicated insiders, the “readers who have a good memory”), enables Ruriko to live on in her true form.⁵² The newspaper serial is formed by its venue and exists because of it; but at the same time, Kikuchi suggests that his fictional story can satisfy readers in a way that news reports cannot, allowing them to become discriminating insiders, able to discern “truth” from “fiction.”

50 An actual institution, Nikakai was established 1914 when founders broke away from Monbushō Bijutsu Tenrankai 文部省美術展覧会, the establishment art group under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. Nikakai art was associated with modern, Western-style paintings; the group still continues to exhibit today (Kikuchi Kan Kenkyūkai 2003, p. 30).

51 In the story, “K.K.” (p. 300) refers to Ruriko's brother, Karasawa Kōichi 唐沢光一, who had been disowned by his father for his desire to be a painter. In the end it is revealed that Ruriko had been supporting him in his quest to become an artist.

52 Ruriko's painting can be read as an intertextual homage to Natsume Sōseki's 夏目漱石 (1867–1916) *Sanshirō* 三四郎 (1908), a famous newspaper serial that also concludes with an exhibited portrait of the enigmatic heroine. Asai argues that Kikuchi borrows from Sōseki here (Asai 1997, pp. 63–64), but I would suggest that there is an intentional contrast, in which Ruriko's portrait clarifies her true character, while the picture of Mineko 美禰子 in *Sanshirō* sustains her opaque quality as an unknowable New Woman.

Shinju fujin as “True” Fiction

In an advertisement for *Shinju fujin* published in the newspapers before the start of the serialization, Kikuchi is quoted as saying:

Novels with an interesting plot seem made up, and novels that do not seem made up are not interesting. I’d like to do my best to bring together interest and reality. I’d like to write a novel that is interesting, but also seems real.⁵³

In developing *Shinju fujin* as an exciting and realistic work of fiction, Kikuchi draws on references to real people, news events, media coverage and current issues of concern to the Taishō readership. As a character inspired by Byakuren, Ruriko particularly allows readers a complex level of “interest and reality.”⁵⁴

As noted earlier, Takagi Takeo comments that the success of *Shinju fujin* was “predetermined” because of its association with Byakuren. He suggests that the public interest in this female celebrity led to the novel’s popularity and bestseller status. After serialization, the work was reprinted in different editions by various publishers throughout the period; it was performed on stage and even made into films in 1927 and 1933.⁵⁵ Popular fascination with Byakuren would have been even greater after the 1921 love scandal and no doubt contributed to the sales of Kikuchi’s novel. But as I have suggested throughout this essay, the Ruriko-Byakuren link reveals something more than just an audience’s superficial interest in a real-life star.

This connection is an important component of *Shinju fujin* because it allows readers to explore such changes in society as golden marriages, as well as ideas about female sexuality and agency. Questions and anxieties about these issues, embodied in a well known celebrity, are exaggerated in a fictional character for the readers’ examination. Furthermore, by using the Ruriko-Byakuren connection, *Shinju fujin* addresses readers’ desire for the truth, an appetite cultivated by the rapidly developing media and celebrity culture. By interacting with the news printed around its borders, *Shinju fujin* makes the reader an insider with full access behind the scenes, a position not provided by “Tsukushi no joō Akiko” or other news reports. It would be an exaggeration to say that truth about Ruriko provides absolute satisfaction for readers as media consumers; nor do I suggest that this is the only kind of pleasure newspaper readers derived from *Shinju fujin*. But when we consider reading as a “compensatory act,” we recognize an overlooked aspect of this intertextual work, as one that allows readers of all classes and sexes to experience the fantasy of being a media insider.

By presenting his story as a kind of “true” fiction with greater access to truth than real news, Kikuchi underscores the importance of his work in contrast to other newspaper texts, such as news reports, or non-fiction features. At the same time, his playful references

⁵³ Kikuchi Kan Kenkyūkai 2003, p. 11.

⁵⁴ See Yamamoto 2003 for a different look at issues of “interest and reality” in *Shinju fujin*. For example, he suggests that Ruriko’s characterization is the result of emphasis on “interest” rather than an attempt to reproduce a realistic process of “humanistic development” (Yamamoto 2003, pp. 87–90).

⁵⁵ Kikuchi Kan Kenkyūkai 2003, pp. 10, 232, 234. There are many postwar renditions of *Shinju fujin* as well, including a 1950 film and a very popular 2002 TV series that differ from Kikuchi’s original story. The success of the TV broadcast led to reprints of Kikuchi’s *Shinju fujin* and his other works; it also spawned a 2002–2003 manga version of *Shinju fujin* by Sachimi Riho さちみりほ based on the Kikuchi text. There are also novel (2002) and manga (2002–2003) versions of the TV series. See Kikuchi Kan Kenkyūkai 2003, pp. 236–41.

to the media do not simply criticize its shortcomings; they also highlight the centrality of newspapers in Taishō culture as sites of both real news *and* fictional entertainment for a mass readership. With this dual move in emphasizing the importance of his art as well as its venue, Kikuchi creates a highly intertextual “true” fiction. *Shinju fujin* provocatively engages contemporary readers’ interest in issues of gender, sexuality and celebrity, while nurturing a sophisticated and critical exploration of news and print media during the Taishō period.

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